

MEN'S BASKETBALL

New Coach + Quick Learners = Fast Start

First-year coach Luke Flockerzi introduces a new offensive system as men's basketball gets off to a quick start.

By Dennis O'Donnell

WHERE'S THE CENTER? AND THE POWER forwards, for that matter? As the Rochester men's basketball team takes to the court this winter, Yellowjacket fans used to seeing players in traditional positions will need to acquaint themselves with a new way of thinking about how to organize five athletes and a basketball.

Gone is the standard system geared toward a point guard, off guard, small forward, power forward, and center. Instead, the Yellowjackets feature four perimeter positions and a low-post threat, known as the "hub."

Let first-year coach Luke Flockerzi draw it up:

Most times on offense, Rochester will set four players high on the perimeter and one—the hub—low, closer to the basket. The players will analyze what the defense shows, then run the best offense to counteract it. It's not one-on-one basketball. It's a mixture of seeing, thinking, and reacting—an approach that Flockerzi believes gives his players the freedom to make decisions and play basketball.

"Anyone can bring the ball up the court," Flockerzi says. "The point guard doesn't have to initiate the offense because positions are interchangeable."

Flockerzi debuted the system this winter as he took over the head coaching duties for the Yellowjackets. The former head coach at Skidmore College, Flockerzi succeeds Mike Neer '88W (MS), who stepped down last spring after leading the Yellowjackets for 34 seasons and establishing the program as one of the winningest in NCAA Division III.

Flockerzi, who was an assistant to Neer in 2006–07, guided the Yellowjackets to a 7–3 overall record at the December break, including the championship of the University's Holiday Inn Airport Invitational tournament. Two of the losses came in a second-round game of the Chuck Resler and the championship of the Wendy's Classic tournaments.

Along the way, the team tied a school re-



OFFENSIVE HUB: As the "hub" of the Yellowjackets offense, 6-foot-8 sophomore Rob Reid is expected to make many of the decisions about how the team handles the ball in the flow of the game. At the semester break, Reid led the team in assists with 30. "He's a very good facilitator and comfortable with the ball in his hands," says coach Luke Flockerzi.

cord for most three-pointers in a game with 16 in the first round of the Resler tourney and set a record for field goal percentage, hitting 73 percent from the field during the semifinals of the Holiday Inn tournament at the Goergen Athletic Center.

“We have some very talented players in the program,” says Flockerzi.

Those players include the past two Rookies of the Year in the University Athletic Association—forward Nate Novosel '12 and guard John DiBartolomeo '13.

“John is one of the top guards I’ve seen at this level,” says Flockerzi, “and Nate is a coach’s dream. He gives it everything he has.”

Mike Labanowski '11 is a three-point shooter who has expanded his game. “He waits for good shots, and he makes open ones,” Flockerzi says, highlighting Labanowski’s defensive intensity as an important team asset.

David Gould '11, a swingman, “is the glue of the team,” Flockerzi says. “When you look at his stat line after a game, you’ll see he has done a little of everything.”


Guard Chris (Chip) Dende '12 and Dan Shapiro '13 are also expected to get regular playing time. As is Nate Vernon '14, who at 6-foot-5 is a prototype of the new offense because of his versatility.

“He’s one of our best shooters,” says the coach. “Along with John and Nate (Novosel), they are three of the best at their positions.”

Noah Jay '14, Greg Pennamon '14, and Peter Wen '11 will also help stock the perimeter. The remaining on-court position—the hub—is expected to be handled by 6-foot-8 Rob Reid '13, who earned playing time down the stretch last season during Rochester’s 15–10 finish.

“He’s a very good facilitator and comfortable with the ball in his hands,” says Flockerzi, who will rely on Reid to make decisions in the flow of the offense.

In January, two players with front-court experience are expected to return to the team after studying overseas. Marcus Roberson, a 6-foot-3 senior, shot 53 percent from the field last year, averaging just under eight points and five rebounds a night. Marcus Williams, a 6-foot-7 junior, played sparingly over his first two years.

“It’s going to be an interesting year,” Flockerzi says. 

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DEBUT: First-year men’s basketball coach Luke Flockerzi, a former Rochester assistant coach, introduced a new offensive scheme that he says will give players the freedom to make decisions about moving the ball to the basket. Early this season the team tied a game-high record for three-pointers and set a game-high record for field goal percentage.